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'Undercover Boss' CEOs Tell What Really Happened After The Show

By [Dan Fastenberg](#)

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It's not every day you'll see CEOs getting their hands dirty, working side-by-side with the rank-and-file. But for four years, the CBS show "[Undercover Boss](#)" has given viewers that chance, showing 60 top executives doing regular jobs, from [flipping hamburgers](#) to [installing alarm systems](#). The show, however, has attracted a share of skepticism: How many of those encounters are real? Do things really change at the companies? What really happens after the lights and cameras are turned off?

AOL Jobs recently spoke to three bosses who appeared on the show to answer those questions and more. The three -- Rick Silva, the CEO of the Checkers and Rally's fast food hamburger chain, Paul Damico, the president of Moe's Southwest Grill, and Dan DiZio, the CEO of the Philly Pretzel Company -- all insisted that the show was unscripted, but they acknowledged that they saw the show as a great public relations opportunity -- though they each had regrets and admitted to some embarrassing moments. "The circumstances are weird, but going undercover gives you the chance to really connect with your workers," said Silva (pictured above on the show). "And you see that many have had very tough lives, so you walk away wanting to help the best."

Rick Silva, CEO of Checkers and Rally's Fast Food Chain

The Episode: In the middle of the third season, Silva visited one of his company's 325 stores in Homestead, Fla., to discover a [dysfunctional branch](#) -- workers weren't being trained properly, the speaker-system at the drive-through was broken and the manager barked orders at the workers. So Silva shut down the branch on the spot.

What he really felt: "I will be honest -- 24, 48 hours after, I felt stupid. I second-guessed myself because I said, 'Maybe there was another answer? But I kept thinking: If one of the leaders in my organization left that restaurant the way it was, then it wouldn't be in line with our culture. The customers and the employees weren't being treated right. So I couldn't find another answer."

What really changed: "I am still mentoring Johanna [who worked at the Homestead branch], even though sometimes she doesn't return my calls. And I leave messages saying, 'This is the CEO calling. Can you at least call me back?' But that kind of relationship is so cool to have. I call [my good workers] 'Johannas' now. And I've got a lot of 'Johannas' out there and they don't feel confident enough for all the right reasons in talking to management. So we've set up a 'coach-to-grow' pilot program to help identify the best people in the company." These members are now picked to work directly with management. And Checkers now gives bonuses directly to team members, not just the branch managers.

Dan DiZio, CEO OF Philly Pretzel Company

The Episode: During his appearance, DiZio, was embarrassed to learn that he'd become one of those "out of touch" CEOs. The owners of one franchise, a couple named Bill and Donna in Bridgeton, N.J., told DiZio that he had previously met with them to [discuss their financial problems](#). But afterward he hadn't helped them out -- and so the couple created their own product -- a "pepperoni pretzel roll" -- and began selling it.

What he really felt: "I just didn't remember the couple. That was emotional for me to hear because I started selling pretzels on the street corner when I was 11 years old." But the couple's move angered him. "That's got to be one of the biggest no-nos you could ever have -- a completely rogue franchisee coming up with its own product, marketing it and selling it."

What really changed: Philly Pretzel ended up "rolling out that [pepperoni pretzel roll] product system-wide, and it's done phenomenally well."

What hasn't: The pay. "I would love to pay more for the work, but there is a point where the market confines us -- I can't start selling pretzels for \$5 apiece. It's a tough place to be. So, yes, it is a little unfair when you see one person makes so much, but that's part of life."

Paul Damico, President of Moe's Southwest Grill

The Episode: Damico visited one of his company's branches in Fort Myers, Fla., during the fourth season and came across a haughty shift supervisor, Tito. Tasked with overseeing the day-to-day operation of the branch, Tito was simply nasty to his workers. He told them to "shut it" and called them "ding-dongs." He also thought that he didn't have to get involved with the actual preparation of the food. In the show's reveal, Damico invited Tito to the company's headquarters in Atlanta to undergo a second round of training before returning to work.

What he really felt: "It was a real shock interacting with this bad egg. And I was on the verge of doing what Rick Silva did [shutting down the restaurant]. But no one was being put in danger, and we were handling the food awesomely." So he decided to keep the branch open and give Tito a second chance. Silva also said that he had own "stupid moment" on the show. "I used my real name and they captured it on film. So I looked like a complete ass."

What's really changed: "I've realized it's OK for my [employees to go slower](#). Especially if that means getting to know the customers' names and what's going on in their lives."

What hasn't: The pay. Workers' pay is a result of how "the market sees you and your value. We thought of doing something like 'Undercover Boss' to increase the value of the brand of our company. Do I think I am overpaid? No. I have done things to increase my personal brand and that's where I sit today."